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## THE TELEOLOGICAL DELUSION

THE primate of Belgium wrote last October in a widely-published pastoral letter: "You are not to know if the world will last 1,000 years more, 10,000,000 years more; not whether you will die in your youth, or in middle age or in extreme old age. Only one thing is necessary, that you know your own soul and that in the all-powerful hands of the Master of Events you shall be the docile instruments . . . for the accomplishment of his will." The untoward events of the last two years Cardinal Mercier explains on familiar dualistic principles. "In the primitive plan of Providence passions were subjected to reason and would never have been permitted to intrude in the peace of families or of nations; but sin has overthrown this generous plan. . . . Pride and cupidity break into the world's balance, repression and armed defense are necessary for its reestablishment." But in accordance with the habit of the Christian dualist this thwarting of the divine will the Primate soon overlooks. "To worship God," he writes, "is to proclaim that God is God, . . . that all He does is well done."

This pastoral letter is not only an interesting reiteration of pre-Darwinian Christian philosophy. Given its background, it is a remarkable expression of some of the means taken again and again by the supernaturalist to give himself a sense of power and of mastery. If he is a Christian he achieves the assurance in three ways, through the conception and feeling of self-control or self-mastery, through belittling the control of others, his mundane masters, through glorifying the power of his own gods, a vicarious, but limitless means of intensifying self-esteem. "If you are at the mercy of events," writes the cardinal, "when you should command them it is because you obey your emotions, though you have the right and power to be their masters. Silence them." It is the cry of self-will, the will to power of the ascetic. "Whatever happens to you, there is in you something which no person or no thing can touch—that is your soul." Invasion or deportation becomes from such a standpoint an insignificant occurrence and the power of the invader or deporter of little moment. "As to real power, power through God, it is yours," writes Cardinal Mercier, "because you identify yourself with an omnipotent Deity. This soul which is yours, of which you are the master—will commune with God, if you desire it—it will be embraced by Him. . . . Each historic period is a page from the divine book of Providence. We write it, but the strong will of the All-Powerful holds the writing instrument." That it is the other way round Cardinal Mercier could not be expected to realize. In order to function properly in the mind of the devout, the principle of

divine vicariousness must be ignored. The readiest way to ignore it is by inversion, making man the instrument of God instead of God the instrument of man.

Cardinal Mercier is undisturbed by any suggestion that God is the instrument of man. And despite the exigencies of his dualism he is also undisturbed by any suggestion that in any way God's power, and consequently man's power, is limited. He is, we must remember, a Catholic theologian. Protestant theologians are less determinedly self-protective. Weakly they listen now and then to the voice of science. And they pay up for it with the panic that comes to any one who apprehends that his source of power is threatened. Of such panic was no small degree in the attitude of the Protestant Church towards the doctrine of evolution. Evolution appeared to undermine the argument of design, of divine purpose. Evolutionary theory might make the world or a part of it seem less of a mystery, but to the theologians that was not the point. The point was their own sense of having something to say about the mystery. They did not mind the mystery so much if only they had a finger in it. And this they had on their theory of their influence with the arbitrary personal designer of the seemingly chaotic universe. And so in self-defense the theologians raged against evolution—until they saw a way out.

Their way out was through a still larger degree of vicariousness and through stretching the argument of design. The law of evolution was conceived of as an instrument of God and consequently as an instrument of man. Evolution soon became indeed an even more pliable instrument than deity. The divine purpose, in spite of rationalizing, would give trouble. It was erratic and even at times incomprehensible. The law of evolution seemed more dependable, and to read your purposes into it took less ingenuity. You had only to consider yourself the fittest, for example, to argue that you were the proper survivor and then did you not cooperate with the will of nature by suppressing the unfit, just as you had cooperated with the will of God by suppressing the wicked or the impious? In eliminating lower types, lower classes, lower races you merely took nature's way, accelerating her a little perhaps. And this direct participation in nature's power gave an even greater satisfaction than the more indirect forms of participation with God. Eugenics and a colonial policy are even more satisfying to a desire for power than vow and sacrifice.

The satisfactions of eugenics and of pride of race have not yet flowered. Science has but begun to put a blight upon them, a blight they will long withstand. Meanwhile ambitious evolutionists are seeking, have sought other outlets for theory and energy. The theory

of racial evolution yields to a theory of cultural evolution, nature to nurture. Advanced evolutionists practise, so to speak, no longer in the name of God or of nature, but in the name of culture. Society, the progress of society, becomes the goal of their enterprising and masterful spirit.

Not that the control of society was not long since a goal for the ambitious. But the ambition was self-limiting, for it was of necessity concerned with keeping society as it was. The sense of power that comes through social control in primitive culture appears to come from resisting change, or in so far as it is inevitable, in pretending to regulate it. The seasons, weather, sun and moon, vegetation, animal life—all are regulated or promoted by ceremonials. Human life, conception, birth, mating, health, death, the whole round of human life is also regulated by ceremonialism. Change, growth or decay, is ignored until it has to be met, then a ceremony is performed to give people the feeling that it is they, after all, who have willed the change. Through ceremonialism, ritual for nature, and ritual for human life, people keep their sense of control. Ceremonialism like supernaturalism is an escape from reality.

But social improvement and education are much wider fields than social conservation and discipline. The idea of social progress is more satisfying to the will to power than ceremonialism. That is why in recent decades the conservative, the ritualist, has taken a back seat. Even contemporaneous pseudo forms of conservatism would not occur were not the struggle against progressivism of itself somewhat satisfying. But the time is not distant, perhaps it is at hand, when, progressives having ceased to pay further attention to conservatives, everybody will call himself a progressive. The arch anti-social then will be the skeptic of progress. Even to-day you are found much more aggravating when you say you do not believe in social progress than when you say you do not believe in God. Social progress has become, as Trotter would put it, a certitude, not a matter of knowledge.

The assumptions necessary for comfortable progressivism have long since been made—an humble beginning for culture, marked degrees of cultural differentiation, conscious social direction.

As in the case of a racial evolution, belief in cultural evolution requires for culture a low starting-point. Pride of race was injured by the idea of simian origin as long as the dogma of racial homogeneity was uppermost, but as soon as the races were differentiated on an evolutionary basis pride of race was immensely flattered by thoughts of simian ancestry or kinship. "The lower races are indeed ape-like," says the racial evolutionist, "but we, the higher race, long since evolved, of course, beyond that stage." Similarly the pride of

cultural evolutionists is flattered by lowly social beginnings. It makes the road already travelled seem longer, more imposing. Consequently the humbleness of so-called savage culture is a welcome conception. The evolutionary publicist, and what publicist is not evolutionary, clings to the wild savage. The wild savage is his *point d' appuis*, his indispensable starting-point. The wilder, the more degraded the savage, the more credit to the civilized. The more backward the backward races, the more advanced the chosen, the favored races. And so the savage, or, as the more sophisticated are given to calling him, primitive man, is held to be lacking in whatever traits his civilized defender most values. Primitive man, we hear, is improvident and thriftless, he is a creature of impulse lacking in self-control, his sex habits are promiscuous, in fact he has no sex habits, we have even been told by the religious that he has no religion.

Even the irreligious who hold that primitive man was a mere complex of religiosity assert that his religion was of a lower type than that of the so-called historic religions. Primitive institutions like primitive human nature are called upon to supply a perspective. The institutions of a modern society will seem more evolved if to them the institutions of primitive societies are a contrast. Posit autocracy, for example, for primitive society, or promiscuity, and democracy and monogamy<sup>1</sup> seem the results of culture evolved to a high degree. If democracy or monogamy be made to appear the unique results of modern culture so much the better.

So much the better, too, because all encroachments upon democracy or monogamy or any so-called modern institution may seem to be a reversion to an earlier type, a social survival, a relic of the unevolved past. Religion, for example, becomes a superstition; any obstacle to your progress, mere conservatism; Satan is rechristened Anachronism. Thus from this point of view there is no need of tolerating any social traits or habits or tendencies which run counter to your own.

Modern culture, then, is held to be an evolution from low cultural stages. But the satisfaction of the cultural evolutionist is incomplete unless he see himself, like the racial evolutionist, a contributor to evolution. Now he sees himself in this rôle more easily if he sees in it likewise his cultural predecessors. In other words, the theory of purposive social activity from the beginnings of society is a comfortable theory. Belief in the rationality of freshly initiated law or mode of life more or less necessitates belief in the rationality

<sup>1</sup> The way the promiscuity theory held its own for a time in scientific circles is as amusing an illustration of the influence of social pressure on science as any I know except perhaps the attitude of many scientists that science is a purely modern development, that outside of civilization there is no science.

of law or custom when it originated. Custom becomes maladjusted, of course, and antiquated, but in the beginning, holds the modern publicist, it was well-planned, serviceable, rational. Belief in the rational origin of custom is as important to the reforming publicist as belief in the divine origin of custom to the theocrat.

The spread of ethnological knowledge will undermine the purposive theory of cultural beginnings; it will undermine the theory of lowly cultural beginnings; it may even shock certain convictions about the differentiations of cultural groups into lower and higher: but faith in cultural progress, our paramount contemporaneous faith, I doubt if any amount of popularization of ethnology will shake. In that very popularization new foundations for the faith will probably be found. As long as our sense of progress gives us the glow religion once gave, we will protect it, protect it quite as ardently as supernaturalists like Cardinal Mercier protect their sense of the plan of Providence.

Witness the protection given our sense of progress in these passing days. See how it is recovering from the great shock inflicted by the European War. The supreme horror of the war lay in its assault on our sense of progress. It threatened to break down our faith, as we said, in civilization. Perhaps for a brief period that faith was indeed shattered or rather some of its foundations, but then, just as the human body builds up tissue to replace tissue lost or injured, so our faith in progress reconstructed for itself necessary points of view. Very early the faith-destroying causes of the war were obscured by the ends of the war. In the ends of the war were seen the ends of civilization. The war was a war for civilization—to Allies and pro-Allies and to Germans and pro-Germans alike.<sup>2</sup> Then when the ends of the war became from their obscurity useless to faith, faith seized on the effects of the war for consolation and support. The consequences of the war, we daily hear, will be important and beneficent, a world more liberal and more peaceful will emerge<sup>3</sup>—England

<sup>2</sup> A little behind Europe, as usual, America has begun to reformulate the slogan of "a war for civilization." Only the other day the presidents of eight women's colleges declared: "Although we believe that the settlement of international difficulties by war is fundamentally wrong, we recognize that in a world crisis such as this it may become our highest duty to defend by force the principles upon which Christian civilization is founded." (*The N. Y. Times*, Mar. 31, 1917.) [It is difficult to understand this except as an assertion that to act in a way you believe to be fundamentally wrong is a principle of Christian civilization. The manifesto, however, is probably not meant to be analyzed.] Since writing the foregoing, the American mill of idealism has turned out unsurpassing products—the war has become a war to end war, a war for democracy, a war to set the world free.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. editorial in the *New Republic*, March 31, 1917.

will be class-free, Russia<sup>4</sup> democratized, Europe purified, Feminism triumphant, Internationalism founded, and a Peace laid that will endure forever<sup>5</sup> even if it pass understanding.

I am, in fact, unable to see how peace can be born of militarism or to differentiate between militarism and militarism, but for the moment I hold no brief against militarism. My emphasis is upon the enormity of the claims made for the outcome of the war and more particularly upon the need felt to make such claims, upon the urge to rationalize war. To quote again from Mercier's pastoral, "Divine Providence . . . finds . . . the means to transform this world, troubled and embittered by the sin of our first parents and by our personal crimes, into a work of redemption which surpasses in the grandeur of moral perfection its own first plan." Now for Divine Providence read civilization expressing itself as war and we have: "War finds the means to transform this world troubled and embittered by savage survivals and by the weakness and faults of human nature, into a work of redemption which surpasses in the grandeur of moral perfection its own first plan."

God's purpose, nature's purpose, society's purpose—that is the course of teleology, of that science which of all the sciences or pseudo-sciences appears to be the most indispensable to human composure, perhaps to human happiness.

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<sup>4</sup> The egg of Russian revolution has been hatched out by the war, but was the egg not laid years ago? Russian revolution has been a nationalistic movement. The Russian autocracy was anti-national. If the national spirit is ready to express itself democratically a national war will no doubt hasten, as it has hastened in Russia, the birth of democracy. None would dispute that a national war might be expected to foster whatever contributes to nationalism or even masks under it. I have in mind the expected enfranchisement of English-women. It is proposed not because of any humanist consideration, but because of the women's national service.

<sup>5</sup> Very uncommon is realism such as that voiced by Charles P. Trevelyan. "The vitality of Europe is ebbing away. It is not the loss of money and of credit. It is not only the waste and desolation of provinces during the war and the economic catastrophes and political upheavals which will everywhere follow in its wake. It is not only the millions of dead and maimed among the young men. But it is the complete collapse of the old national standards. . . . After the war tyranny and militarism . . . will cling [in Germany] with fierce tenacity to their old strongholds and in Britain to their new-found opportunity." But even Trevelyan suggests that there may be "an instinctive popular reaction against them." (An open letter published in the *United States*, December 5, 1916.)